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Original Article

# Immigrants' Attitudes towards Welfare Redistribution. An Exploration of Role of Government Preferences among Immigrants and Natives across 18 European Welfare States

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## Abstract

An oft-heard concern about the sustainability of the welfare state is that generous social welfare provisions serve as an important pull factor in immigrants' consideration of their preferred country of destination. With their accumulated social risks, immigrants are averagely more likely to claim welfare benefits, suggesting that generous provisions reinforce migration flows, and that migrants benefit more from welfare than they contribute to it. Yet, little is known about what immigrants actually think about government support to ensure a reasonable standard of living. To study immigrants' ideas about the welfare state, we analyse the 2008 'Welfare Attitudes' module of the European Social Survey. Our analysis shows that, although immigrants have somewhat stronger pro-welfare opinions than non-immigrants, these are largely explained by their more disadvantaged position in society and their more depressed opinions of the social malaise taking place in their receptive society. Furthermore, much to our surprise, we find that immigrants' views on welfare closely follow those of the non-migrant population of the country they are living in, suggesting strong social integration at the opinion level.

## Introduction

Current economic recession has deteriorated immigrants' employment opportunities even further, with unemployment rates raised by 5% between 2008 and 2012 compared with a 3% increase among natives (OECD, 2013). This trend makes immigrants proportionally more likely to claim welfare (Boeri, Hanson and McCormik, 2002), causing growing concern about the tense relationship between immigration and the welfare state. The idea that generous welfare provision attracts immigrants—'welfare magnetism' (Borjas, 1999)—also exists among public opinion, as Europeans *en masse* think that immigration is a strain for the welfare state (Wright and Reeskens, 2013). In addition, of all social risks (including old age and being unemployed), being an immigrant is perceived as a least justified reason for welfare deservingness (van Oorschot, 2000, 2006). Europeans generally require immigrants to have worked and paid taxes for a longer period before being entitled

to welfare (Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012). Combined, majority Europeans' idea of immigrants is one of eager welfare claimants who benefit more than they contribute (van der Waal, De Koster and van Oorschot, 2013).

In sharp contrast with the *vox populi* that immigrants have an opportunistic relationship with the welfare state, hardly any empirical studies exist that undergird a specific eagerness of immigrants to ask for more welfare provision compared to native residents [see Dancygier and Saunders (2006) and Luttmer and Singhal (2011) for exceptions]. Two general assumptions will guide our study. First, we claim that if immigrants make a strong appeal than natives for redistribution, this is largely caused by possible differences in their socioeconomic position, ideological beliefs, and welfare relevant social perceptions. The second assumption is that, relying on social integration theory (van Tubergen, 2007), immigrants' welfare preferences gradually resemble those of natives. To evaluate this proposition, we study differences between natives and first- and second-generation immigrants in levels and in the roots of welfare preferences. We further test if immigrants' welfare ideas are an imprint of dominant ideas about the role of government (hereafter: RoG) among the native population.

To study immigrants' preferred RoG, we analyse the 'Welfare Attitudes' module of the 2008 European Social Survey (ESS). Although the ESS has not oversampled minorities, it allows for distinguishing native respondents from first- and second-generation immigrants; among immigrants, we can further trace their country of origin, distinguish citizens from non-citizens, and know the length of residence of the first generation.

## Literature Review

### Immigrants and the Welfare State

Immigrants' relationship with the welfare state is often portrayed as imbalanced. Economic 'push-pull' models (Hatton and Williamson, 1998; Castles and Miller, 2003), which describe migration as a rational consideration of the costs of leaving the origin country (push) with the potential benefits that can be obtained in the destination country (pull), have considered welfare provision as an important factor in immigrants' decision for a preferred host society (Borjas, 1989, 1999). This econometric model would explain that equilibrium is reached if a micro-level demand from vulnerable immigrants to remedy their deprived condition is being supplied by generous welfare programmes. Contrasting American evidence (Borjas, 1999), 'welfare magnetism' seems to be minimal in Europe, as migration flows to Europe respond to opportunities on the labour market more than to social safety net provision (Hooghe *et al*., 2008; De Giorgi and Pellizzari, 2009). Despite these macro-level studies refuting welfare magnetism in a European context, the idea that welfare provisions bias migration flows is rather persistent (Kvist, 2004).

Welfare provision is not only believed to distort migration flows, but also immigrants' host-society incorporation. Koopmans (2010) recently argued that in generous welfare states, the 'warm handshake' of low economic penalties for non-activity hinders immigrants' initiative for integration (see also Nannestad, 2007). The claim is that in less developed welfare states with stronger demands asked from immigrants to invest in their employability, for instance by means of training and language acquisition, activity rates of immigrants would be higher. Koopmans (2010, p. 21) finds empirical support for his argument in The Netherlands, Sweden, and Belgium—all generous welfare states[1]—as 'immigrants were able to survive on welfare support without making such [linguistic and cultural skills] adjustments'.

Yet, ideas about distorted migration flows and immigrants' problematic host country incorporation caused by generous welfare support implicitly depart from the assumption that net of their more vulnerable socioeconomic position, immigrants strongly favour welfare provision, maybe even more than natives do. Empirical evidence of what immigrants actually think about the RoG in ensuring a reasonable standard of living is, however, scarce. Most studies on opinions towards welfare redistribution distinguishing between immigrants and non-immigrants often limit foreign origin as a control variable (Wright and Reeskens, 2013). The few studies so far nonetheless suggest that immigrants are more in favour of welfare than natives (Dancygier and Saunders, 2006; Luttmer and Singhal, 2011).

### Self-Interest, Ideas, and Perceptions

Why should one expect that immigrants, as a social group, have stronger RoG preferences? Students of welfare legitimacy argue that support for welfare programmes rests on three explanations: self-interest, political ideology, and deservingness perceptions (Blekesaune and Quadango, 2003).

According to the self-interest proposition, people who benefit from welfare redistribution are more likely to support it (Kangas, 1997; Svallfors, 2004). Immigrants' and their descendants' socioeconomic outcomes are, as studies show, rather negative (OECD, 2013): they are more likely to have lower levels of

education, be unemployed, and report lower income levels than natives (Heath *et al*., 2008). Given their more deprived position, the finding that immigrants rely relatively more on welfare provisions than the native population (Boeri, Hanson and McCormik, 2002; Muenz and Fassmann, 2004) is not surprising. This leads to the hypothesis that immigrants' stronger demand for state intervention is mediated by their more vulnerable socio-economic position.

A second mechanism concerns symbolic politics (Sears, Hensler and Speer, 1979; Sears *et al*., 1980; Jaeger 2006, 2008), stating that policy preferences—including redistributive preferences—are determined by values and norms socialized in pre-adulthood (Sears *et al*., 1980), such as political ideology (Jaeger, 2008). This causal model predicts that conservative people at the right of this political spectrum—generally propagating individual freedom and favouring *laissez-faire* politics—would be less convinced of redistribution, contrary to liberal left individuals who, having a clearer eye for equality and intervention to achieve it, prefer redistribution more. Although studies are limited, evidence shows that left-wing parties accommodate more to claims made by minorities, making immigrants more likely to vote for these parties (Dancygier and Saunders, 2006). Consequently, we propose that immigrants' stronger RoG preferences are mediated by their leftist political ideas.

Our third hypothesis predicts that stronger welfare preferences depend on people's perceptions about the deservingness of vulnerable social groups (van Oorschot, Reeskens and Meuleman, 2012). It has been shown that a higher demand from government is expressed among those who perceive the living conditions of the poor and other welfare target groups as worse, as well as among people who have a more pessimistic outlook on the economic situation of their country (van Oorschot, 2006; Roosma, Gelissen and Van Oorschot, 2012). Although it is not self-evident whether immigrants would have deservingness opinions that make them more pro-welfare, than natives—we leave this up for empirical testing—we nonetheless propose that immigrants' stronger interventionist preferences are mediated by their stronger deservingness perceptions.

## Social Integration and Acculturation

When political economists assume that immigrants' decision to migrate to European societies is driven by strong welfare preferences, the question is what one assumes specifically: that all migrants have high levels of such preference regardless of the destination country, or that immigrants have somewhat higher preferences than the natives of the country they are now living in? As hardly any study compared immigrants' responses to RoG preferences with natives' demand (for an exception, see Luttmer and Singhal, 2011), we borrow insights from related studies.

Social integration theory (Durkheim, 1951) would suggest a plausible relationship between immigrants' and natives' preferences for welfare. As van Tubergen argues (2007, p. 748), 'people who are strongly integrated into a social group are assumed to be more likely to comply with the norms of that group'. To the extent that the society an immigrant joins expresses particular ideas about the RoG, immigrants are likely to follow suit (Dinesen and Hooghe 2010; Maxwell, 2010; Reeskens and Wright, 2014). To test this theoretical assumption in more detail, we suggest a few hypotheses and corresponding research strategies.

In a straightforward manner, this theory suggests first of all overlap between natives' and immigrants' RoG preferences (Dinesen and Hooghe, 2010), implying that in countries where natives exhibit higher demand for welfare intervention, immigrants should do so as well; alternatively, in a context of natives' skepticism towards government, we should expect immigrants to be less in favour of intervention.

Second, social integration theory further implies a temporal dimension, too. On the one hand, the expectation is that those who have enjoyed full socialization into their receptive society—second-generation immigrants—will resemble the natives of their host society more. Consequently, larger gaps in the preferred RoG are expected between natives and first-generation immigrants. On the second hand, for those immigrants born outside the country—the first generation—social integration theory would suggest that those immigrants who have resided longer in the host society will resemble more the natives' levels of support. Further, apart from studying differences in RoG preferences between natives and immigrants, a different strategy suggests investigating whether these preferences are explained by the same set of factors equally for immigrants and natives (Reeskens and Wright, 2014). In line with the idea of the 'welfare magnet', it may be expected that recently arrived immigrants as a group more strongly favour welfare redistribution—which implies that differentiation among these immigrants would be low. But the more immigrants reside in the country, it should be expected that their opinion on redistributive social policies is an expression of the structural and social position they hold, and their perceptions on society.

Third, next to this more sociological approach to 'acculturation', the legal transition into citizenship might affect individual opinions, too (Prokic-Breuer

*et al.*, 2012). As redistribution regards the allocation of 'goods' and 'bads' in society, legal citizenship status—which brings about rights as much as obligations—creates a strong concern about the correct allocation of scarce welfare resources. Citizens ought to have a stronger stake in the welfare state than non-citizens. An additional explanation is that immigrants' access to welfare is restricted, demarcated either by length of residence or citizenship, which in any case predicts stronger demands for intervention from non-citizens.

Fourth, the explanations so far neglect immigrants' partial or full socialization in a foreign context. Related evidence proposes that first-generation immigrants' political and social values are often an imprint of their origin country (Dinesen, 2013); second-generation immigrants, on the other hand, have received socialization by parents or grandparents who lived in a country different from their current host society (Uslaner, 2008). A recent study limited to European immigrants only—without exploring the rich heterogeneity in immigrant composition across Europe—showed that immigrants' welfare preferences are culturally determined and reflect their country of origin (Luttmer and Singhal, 2011). Our study therefore fully explores whether immigrants from poorer peripheral countries make stronger appeal to welfare redistribution than immigrant originating from wealthier societies, as push-pull models predict (Borjas, 1999).

## Data and Methods

### Sample

In this study, we analyse the ESS 2008, for which representative samples of >20 countries were questioned on a number of political and social issues. Particular for the 2008 wave is its extensive welfare attitudes battery. Because the ESS aims at being representative for the total population, it has not oversampled immigrants, causing us to drop countries with <20 respondents per immigrant category, as it would lead to imprecise estimates. We also limit the number of countries to EU or OECD member states, leaving us with 30,475 respondents for 18 countries.[2] Further, because the ESS is fielded in languages spoken by >5 per cent of the population, it only includes the best integrated immigrants.[3] Limitations of this sampling design is discussed throughout, yet, we can rely on previous studies on migrant incorporation analysing representative social surveys in a similar manner (Dinesen and Hooghe, 2010; Maxwell, 2010; de Rooij, 2012; Reeskens and Wright, 2014).

Because the ESS has not oversampled minority respondents, we briefly review our sample, distinguishing between native residents (those born in the country with domestic parents), second-generation immigrants (those born in the country but at least one parent of foreign origin), and first-generation immigrants (born abroad). As a reference, we include the proportion of foreign-born residents in each country for 2008, estimated via linear interpolation of UN 2005 and 2010 statistics. As Table 1 shows, an almost perfect correlation ($\rho = .92$) exists between the proportion of first-generation immigrants in the ESS and the UN foreign-born estimates. To further evaluate the validity of the ESS immigrant sample, immigrants' country of origin and their parents' country of origin are recoded into meaningful regional clusters. Descriptives (Supplementary Table A1) suggest that the representation of the origin regions largely reflects immigration histories of the studied host countries (cf. Castles and Miller, 2003).

### Dependent Variable

Welfare preferences are measured with a latent scale composed of six items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$) measuring the opinion to which one thinks it is the responsibility of the government to ensure (i) jobs for everyone who wants one, (ii) adequate health care for the sick, (iii) a reasonable standard of living for the old, (iv) a

**Table 1.** Distribution of natives, second-generation immigrants and first-generation immigrants in the European Social Survey, and the UN share of immigrants' data estimates

| Country | Natives | | Second generation | | First generation | | UN estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *N* | Pct | *N* | Pct | *N* | Pct | |
| CH | 1,113 | 68.0 | 142 | 8.7 | 382 | 23.3 | 22.84 |
| IE | 1,368 | 82.2 | 30 | 1.8 | 266 | 16.0 | 18.64 |
| LV | 1,238 | 74.6 | 170 | 10.2 | 251 | 15.1 | 15.64 |
| EE | 890 | 67.2 | 167 | 12.6 | 267 | 20.2 | 14.16 |
| SE | 1,408 | 82.9 | 91 | 5.4 | 199 | 11.7 | 13.38 |
| DE | 2,200 | 87.2 | 110 | 4.4 | 214 | 8.5 | 13.02 |
| FR | 1,611 | 84.6 | 136 | 7.1 | 158 | 8.3 | 10.66 |
| ESS average | 26,111 | 85.7 | 1,493 | 4.9 | 2,871 | 9.4 | 10.64 |
| NL | 1,439 | 86.7 | 66 | 4.0 | 154 | 9.3 | 10.54 |
| GB | 1,838 | 86.9 | 81 | 3.8 | 197 | 9.3 | 10.12 |
| GR | 1,766 | 91.5 | 53 | 2.7 | 114 | 5.9 | 9.58 |
| NO | 1,317 | 89.3 | 37 | 2.5 | 120 | 8.0 | 9.20 |
| BE | 1,349 | 82.8 | 120 | 7.3 | 160 | 9.8 | 8.86 |
| DK | 1,347 | 91.1 | 47 | 3.2 | 85 | 5.7 | 8.40 |
| SI | 933 | 85.1 | 70 | 6.4 | 94 | 8.6 | 8.22 |
| PT | 1,785 | 93.1 | 26 | 1.4 | 107 | 5.6 | 8.04 |
| CZ | 1,664 | 94.1 | 73 | 4.1 | 32 | 1.8 | 4.40 |
| HU | 1,375 | 96.0 | 27 | 1.9 | 30 | 2.1 | 3.54 |
| SK | 1,470 | 94.4 | 47 | 3.0 | 41 | 2.6 | 2.36 |

reasonable standard of living for the unemployed, (v) sufficient childcare services for working parents, and (vi) paid leave from work for people who have to take care of sick family members is provided. Each item is offered with an 11-point response scale ranging from 'it should not be governments' responsibility at all' (0) to 'it should be entirely governments' responsibility' (10). This latent 'preferred Role of Government' (hereafter 'RoG') scale[4] has been shown to constitute the core of welfare legitimacy (van Oorschot and Meuleman, 2012) and passes conventionally cross-national measurement equivalence tests (Roosma, Gelissen and Van Oorschot, 2012).

## Independent Variables

Our individual-level predictors (see Supplementary Tables A2 and A3 for descriptives) of self-interest regard first of all educational levels, measured by the harmonized International Standard Classification of Education scale ranging from 'less than lower secondary education' (1) to 'tertiary education completed' (5). Work status is categorized by being employed (reference), being unemployed, being a student, being retired, and being in another status. Unemployed experiences are captured by a dummy whether or not (reference) one has been unemployed for longer than 3 months. Income is measured using a harmonized 10-point scale. In final, we also include whether or not (reference) the respondent's main source of income is welfare benefits.[5]

Political ideas are measured by the traditional left–right self-placement scale. For perceptions, we first consider 'perceived welfare burden', referring to respondents' estimates of the omnipresence of various social problems. This measure is a latent scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$) of items asking of every 100 people of working age, how many (i) are unemployed and looking for a job, (ii) are long-term sick or disabled, and (iii) do not have enough money for basic necessities. The scale runs from 1 ('0–4') to 11 ('50 or more'). Last, perceptions of the poor living conditions of risk groups are measured by a latent scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.65$) comprising the items what one thinks of the living conditions of the pensioners and the unemployed. Response scales range from extremely good ('0') to extremely bad ('10').

As for characteristics unique for immigrants, we distinguish between citizens and non-citizens (reference). For first-generation immigrants (born abroad), we include length of residence, which asked the respondent 'How long ago did you first come to live in [country]?', ranging from 'within last year' ('1') to 'more than 20 years ago' ('5'). Immigrants' (or their parents') region of origin is also included, distinguishing between (i) Western European origin (reference); (ii) Eastern European origin; (iii) Russia or Caucasian countries; (iv) African countries; (v) Asian countries; (vi) Middle Eastern countries; (vii) North American countries; (viii) South American countries, including Central American countries; (ix) Oceania; and (x) no information available.

We control for age, ranging from 16 to 99, with the expectation that elderly respondents are more pro-welfare (Inglehart, 1990). We also include gender, with the expectation that women support redistribution more than men (reference) (d'Anjou, Steijn and Van Aarsen, 1995).

To cope with considerable non-response on income (23 per cent) and political ideology (11 per cent), multiple imputation is applied (Rubin, 1987). As advised by Graham, Olchowski and Gilreath (2007), we imputed 40 data sets in which the missing values are replaced by different imputations that reflect uncertainty in the missing data. The used imputation model is linear regression, including all variables of our individual-level analysis.[6]

## Analytical Strategy

First, at the bivariate level, we evaluate to what extent first- and second-generation immigrants differ from natives in their preferred RoG. Second, we evaluate whether such differences can be explained by differences between immigrants and natives in their socioeconomic status, political ideas, and related perceptions. Third, we assess whether opinions towards welfare redistribution are structured by the same set of theoretically relevant covariates, equally for immigrants and natives. Fourth, we explore the role of immigrant-specific explanations such as country-of-origin effects. Fifth and final, we estimate how alike immigrants' opinions are to the support levels of natives of the country they migrated to.

We perform multilevel regression analysis using SPSS' MIXED maximum likelihood procedure (Gelman and Hill, 2006; Hox, 2010), to account for the clustered nature of the ESS—individuals within countries. The robustness of the individual-level models is confirmed using fixed-effects models (Alison, 2009). In our analysis, we pay further attention to the *r*-squared values for both natives and immigrants, to untangle whether opinions are more structured among natives than among immigrants. To calculate the *r*-squared values at the individual and country levels, we make use of the formulas showing the proportional reduction in variance (Snijders and Bosker, 1999). Additional reported model fit indices include the −2loglikelihood and the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) coefficient (Gelman and Hill, 2006).

## Results

### Exploring Differences between Natives and Immigrants

An exploratory analysis of variance test (5.32; df = 2; $P < 0.01$) on the pooled data reveals a weak but significant difference between natives (7.55; SD = 1.54) and first-generation immigrants (7.64; SD = 1.57) in their preferred RoG, whereas there is no difference between natives and second-generation immigrants (7.63; SD = 1.56). First-generation immigrants—without full socialization in their host society—are thus more in demand of state intervention.

These single-level descriptives are amplified when taking the nested data structure into account (Model 1 of Table 2). The bivariate analysis shows that second-generation immigrants prefer a slightly stronger RoG compared with native residents (b = 0.11; SE = 0.038). There are larger discrepancies between first-generation immigrants and native respondents, as first-generation immigrants are almost 0.2 scale points more in support of redistribution (b = 0.18; SE = 0.029). Albeit *statistically* significant, this difference can hardly be called *substantially* significant.

In any case, the bivariate analysis shows that there are small, yet meaningful differences between natives and immigrants in their preferred RoG, because the analysis hints about the applicability of social integration theory on explaining welfare opinions among immigrants. Second-generation immigrants resemble more the preferred levels of state intervention of the native population than first-generation immigrants do.

**Table 2.** Multilevel regression models explaining preferred role of government

| Fixed effects | Model 1: origin only | | Model 2: with controls | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Parameter | SE | Parameter | SE |
| Intercept | 7.557*** | 0.145 | 7.060*** | 0.134 |
| Immigrant status: | | | | |
| Second generation | 0.111** | 0.038 | 0.015 | 0.037 |
| First generation | 0.182*** | 0.029 | 0.094*** | 0.028 |
| Ref: native | | | | |
| Levels of education | | | −0.027*** | 0.007 |
| Work status | | | | |
| Unemployed | | | 0.021 | 0.040 |
| Student | | | −0.124** | 0.037 |
| Retired | | | 0.034 | 0.034 |
| Other status | | | 0.003 | 0.028 |
| Ref: paid work | | | | |
| Unemployment experience | | | 0.114*** | 0.020 |
| Income | | | −0.029*** | 0.004 |
| On welfare benefit | | | −0.011 | 0.029 |
| Political left–right ideology | | | −0.074*** | 0.004 |
| Welfare burden | | | 0.075*** | 0.004 |
| Perceived living conditions | | | 0.120*** | 0.005 |
| Women | | | 0.102*** | 0.016 |
| Age | | | 0.000 | 0.001 |
| **Random effects** | **Parameter** | **SE** | **Parameter** | **SE** |
| Individual-level variance | 2.026*** | 0.016 | 1.882*** | 0.015 |
| Country-level variance | 0.378** | 0.130 | 0.254** | 0.087 |
| Individual *r*-squared | 0.145% | | 7.201% | |
| Country *r*-squared | 0.000% | | 32.074% | |
| −2loglikelihood | 108,107.950 | | 105,958.944 | |
| BIC | 108,128.599 | | 105.979.593 | |
| *N* | 30,475 | | 30,475 | |

*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$; ***$P < 0.001$. Entries represent the results of two separate multilevel regression analyses.

## Explaining Differences between Natives and Immigrants

Can immigrants' slightly higher support for state intervention be explained by differences in socioeconomic positions, political beliefs, and social perceptions? As Supplementary Tables A2 and A3 indicate, immigrants are not less educated, but are on the other hand more likely to be unemployed and have a higher likelihood of having been unemployed for longer than 3 months. Moreover, while there are no income differences between natives and second-generation immigrants, first-generation immigrants' incomes are significantly lower than those of other residents. Further, descriptives indicate that immigrants are slightly more leftist, have stronger perceptions of the social malaise of society, and perceive the living conditions of disadvantaged groups as significantly worse compared with native respondents.

Controlling for variables relevant for explaining welfare attitudes, Model 2 of Table 2 shows that second-generation immigrants do not differ significantly from native respondents ($b = 0.018$; $SE = 0.037$), whereas the first-generation effect is cut in half compared with the bivariate effect presented in Model 1 of Table 2 ($b = 0.094$; $SE = 0.028$). Detailed stepwise regressions (see Supplementary Table A4) indicate that immigrants' slightly stronger preferences about the RoG can to a large extent be explained by their higher likelihood to be unemployed, their more leftist political views, and, in particular, their more depressed views on the social state of their host country, as well as on the living conditions of their vulnerable fellow residents. These relevant independent variables do, however, not completely cancel out the gap in welfare opinions between first-generation immigrants and native respondents.

## Different Roots in Natives' and Immigrants' Preferred RoG?

In addition to the performed mediation analysis, a different way to respond to the question whether immigrants gradually resemble natives' preferred RoG is to detect whether immigrants' opinions are structured by the same set of variables as it does for natives.

Albeit not a strong statistical test, the presented *r*-squared values of Tables 3 indicate that second-generation immigrants' opinions are more structured than first-generation immigrants' attitudes towards the welfare state. Further eyeballing the determination structures, it seems that self-interest predictors are particularly relevant among the native population: the higher educated as well as those with unemployment experiences and lower-income groups prefer a stronger RoG. Interaction tests (Supplementary Tables A5 and A6) show that the effects of education and those with an unemployment experience are different for first-generation immigrants, i.e. higher-educated immigrants do not have weaker RoG preferences than lower-educated immigrants; further, first-generation immigrants with an unemployment experience of at least 3 months have weaker demands than natives with such an unemployment experience. Subsequently, second-generation immigrants on benefit are less in demand of interventionism than natives. Concerning self-interest explanations, first-generation immigrants thus differ more from natives than second-generation immigrants do; additionally, if effects differ, the most vulnerable immigrants seem to, contrary to our expectations, demand less from government than natives do.

Table 3 (and Supplementary Tables A5 and A6 for interaction tests) shows that ideological dispositions and social perceptions influence RoG perceptions among natives and immigrants alike: immigrants at the right also oppose interventionism than those at the left, similar as natives do. Also, perceiving that society has many social problems and perceiving risk groups in a poor living condition translates in a higher demand for state intervention to ensure a reasonable living condition. Important to note is that political ideology and burden perceptions largely absorb effects of self-interest, suggesting that respondents in vulnerable positions lean to the left and have stronger perceptions of the social malaise of society.

In summary, at the individual level, we see that whereas natives' preferred RoG are well-structured, deviances can be found among first-generation immigrants. These findings corroborate the idea that immigrants gradually acculturate to natives' ideas about welfare redistribution.

## Immigrant-Specific Explanations for Welfare Preferences

To further untangle whether acculturation of welfare attitudes occurs, variation between immigrants is studied. With regard to citizenship, we see our hypothesis that citizens are less in favour of state intervention only confirmed among second-generation immigrants.[7] Contrasting our expectation, length of residence has a positive effect on the demand for more state intervention. A possible explanation is that at the point of entry, immigrants simply refrain from asking assistance but later catch up to natives' preferences, as they also contribute more to their origin country albeit they might face unequal welfare access. This mechanism disqualifies the idea that recently arrived immigrants would be rather

**Table 3.** Multilevel regression models explaining preferred role of government among European native borns and second- and first-generation immigrants

| Fixed effects | Native born | | Second generation | | First generation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Parameter | SE | Parameter | SE | Parameter | SE |
| Intercept | 7.067*** | 0.139 | 7.182*** | 0.308 | 7.067*** | 0.257 |
| Levels of education | −0.036*** | 0.008 | −0.006 | 0.033 | 0.021 | 0.021 |
| Work status | | | | | | |
| Unemployed | 0.015 | 0.045 | 0.090 | 0.158 | 0.066 | 0.111 |
| Student | −0.135** | 0.041 | −0.030 | 0.144 | −0.046 | 0.130 |
| Retired | 0.029 | 0.037 | −0.075 | 0.167 | 0.078 | 0.112 |
| Other status | −0.018 | 0.031 | 0.066 | 0.127 | 0.127 | 0.086 |
| Ref: paid work | | | | | | |
| Unemployed experience | 0.125*** | 0.021 | 0.096 | 0.084 | 0.045 | 0.059 |
| Income | −0.030*** | 0.004 | −0.008 | 0.017 | −0.023° | 0.013 |
| On welfare benefit | −0.002 | 0.031 | −0.236° | 0.129 | 0.033 | 0.090 |
| Left–right ideology | −0.073*** | 0.004 | −0.084*** | 0.018 | −0.076*** | 0.013 |
| Welfare burden | 0.074*** | 0.004 | 0.081*** | 0.016 | 0.064*** | 0.012 |
| Perceived living conditions | 0.125*** | 0.006 | 0.103*** | 0.023 | 0.077*** | 0.016 |
| Women | 0.106*** | 0.018 | 0.122 | 0.075 | 0.050 | 0.053 |
| Age | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.003 | 0.003 | −0.002 | 0.003 |
| Citizen | | | −0.303* | 0.125 | −0.098 | 0.061 |
| Length of residence | | | | | 0.087** | 0.033 |
| Origin region | | | | | | |
| Eastern Europe | | | 0.045 | 0.126 | −0.077 | 0.084 |
| Russia/Caucasus | | | 0.120 | 0.127 | 0.041 | 0.107 |
| Africa | | | 0.105 | 0.168 | −0.035 | 0.102 |
| Asia | | | −0.688* | 0.280 | −0.218 | 0.196 |
| Middle East | | | 0.160 | 0.175 | −0.027 | 0.104 |
| North America | | | 0.419 | 0.267 | −0.346° | 0.185 |
| South America | | | −0.660° | 0.350 | 0.063 | 0.172 |
| Oceania | | | 0.480 | 0.811 | −0.144 | 0.327 |
| Other | | | −0.122 | 0.270 | 0.101 | 0.171 |
| Ref: West Europe | | | | | | |
| **Random effects** | **Parameter** | **SE** | **Parameter** | **SE** | **Parameter** | **SE** |
| Individual-level variance | 1.876*** | 0.016 | 1.911*** | 0.071 | 1.819*** | 0.049 |
| Country-level variance | 0.264** | 0.091 | 0.182* | 0.075 | 0.314** | 0.118 |
| Individual *r*-squared | 7.293% | | 6.438% | | 4.635% | |
| Country *r*-squared | 31.794% | | 45.016% | | 26.442% | |
| −2loglikelihood | 90,702.921 | | 5291.711 | | 9,889.712 | |
| BIC | 90,723.260 | | 5306.295 | | 9,905.598 | |
| *N* | 26,111 | | 1,493 | | 2,871 | |

°$P < 0.10$; *$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$; ***$P < 0.001$. Entries represent the results of three separate multilevel regression analyses.

opportunistic. Observing region-of-origin effects, then, we see hardly any consistent patterns. Second-generation Asian and Southern American immigrants ask for less intervention than those originating from Western Europe; among first-generation immigrants, we see that North Americans have slightly weaker RoG preferences. In any case, a general trend that immigrants from poorer regions are more in demand of intervention cannot be found.

Summarized, a study of immigrant-specific characteristics further refutes the idea that immigrants are in general in an opportunistic relationship with the welfare state. Citizens of foreign origin have more stakes in the

correct allocation of scarce resources, making them more skeptical than non-citizens. In the absence of country-of-origin effects, we have, however, no convincing evidence for a strong cultural imprint of the immigrants.

### Adaptation to the Host-Country Mainstream

So far, we have compared average differences between natives and first- and second-generation immigrants, leaving aside the question whether immigrants' RoG preferences reflect those of the natives of their adoptive society. Social integration theory suggests a close association between second-generation immigrants and native respondents, while this overlap is somewhat weaker between first-generation immigrants and natives.

At the bivariate level, Figure 1 shows the association between natives and second-generation immigrants, and natives and first-generation immigrants, of their aggregate RoG preferences. In case of a perfect overlap, all countries should collapse with the solid line. The graphs indicate a strong positive association between welfare attitudes of the native population and the immigrants residing in these countries, albeit a more perfect association for the second generation (indicated by more variation in the first-generation graph). In other words, in countries where the majority is less in demand of interventionism, immigrants will be more skeptical, too.

To verify that the overlap between immigrants and natives in their opinions about welfare redistribution does not reflect differences in immigrants' group composition, a more formal test requires aggregating natives' preferences at the country level, and estimating the effect of natives' responses on first- and second-generation immigrants' opinion, controlling for individual-level respondent characteristics. Assuring that immigrants' opinion does not depend on the size of the welfare state (see for instance van Oorschot and Meuleman, 2012), we also control for social expenditure per capita, as obtained from Eurostat. Such a test would also respond to the 'welfare magnetism' thesis whether immigrants in more generous welfare states make stronger demands. Bivariate graphs (Supplementary Figure A1) show that immigrants' preferred RoG is not determined by the size of the welfare state.

Table 4 indicates that immigrants' preferred RoG is a reflection of how strong majority residents' preferred RoG actually is, and unrelated to the size of the welfare state. Observing the *r*-squared values at the country level, we further see that the explanatory power of natives' welfare opinions on immigrants' attitudes is larger for second-generation than for first-generation immigrants, confirming social integration theory.

To be complete, a similar exercise has been done for Western European and non-Western European immigrants. The results, found in Supplementary Figure A2 and Table A7, show that both groups of immigrants acculturate to natives' welfare preferences, yet, effects seem to be stronger for Western European immigrants, implying that the acculturation to the mainstream is slightly more difficult among non-Western European immigrants.

## Conclusion

For welfare states to be sustainable, support given by public opinion—claimants and contributors alike—is of vital importance (Brooks and Manza, 2007). With an increase in studies showing that Europeans perceive that immigrants take out more of the welfare state than they put in, the aim of this article was to evaluate whether immigrant opinions about welfare redistribution are as opportunistic as the *vox populi* hold. Our leading assumptions were, on the one hand, that immigrants do have stronger RoG preferences, but only because they are socioeconomically more vulnerable, have more leftist political views, and have stronger deservingness view; on the other hand, based on social integration theory (Durkheim, 1951; van Tubergen, 2007), we proposed that immigrants' redistributive preferences accommodate to the context they live in.

An analysis of the 2008 ESS shows that whereas immigrants are *significantly* more in support for government intervention, this demand is not *substantially* higher. Further, this higher request is indeed largely explained by the fact that their objective socioeconomic position is slightly worse compared with natives, but also that their subjective interpretation of society in ideas and perceptions is more depressed. Taking such precarious socioeconomic conditions, left-wing ideologies, and corresponding negative opinions on society into account, differences between second-generation and native respondents disappear and are reduced among first-generation immigrants. First-generation immigrants still have slightly more stronger RoG preferences that cannot be completely explained by their structural and cultural characteristics. Potentially, such stronger RoG preferences are a response of higher barriers to welfare state access.

Our study shows that immigrants' opinions about the welfare state acculturate to the mainstream. Not only are there larger gaps with natives' preferences for first- than for second-generation immigrants, the latter groups' preferences are also more structured in conventional explanations; less differentiation exists among

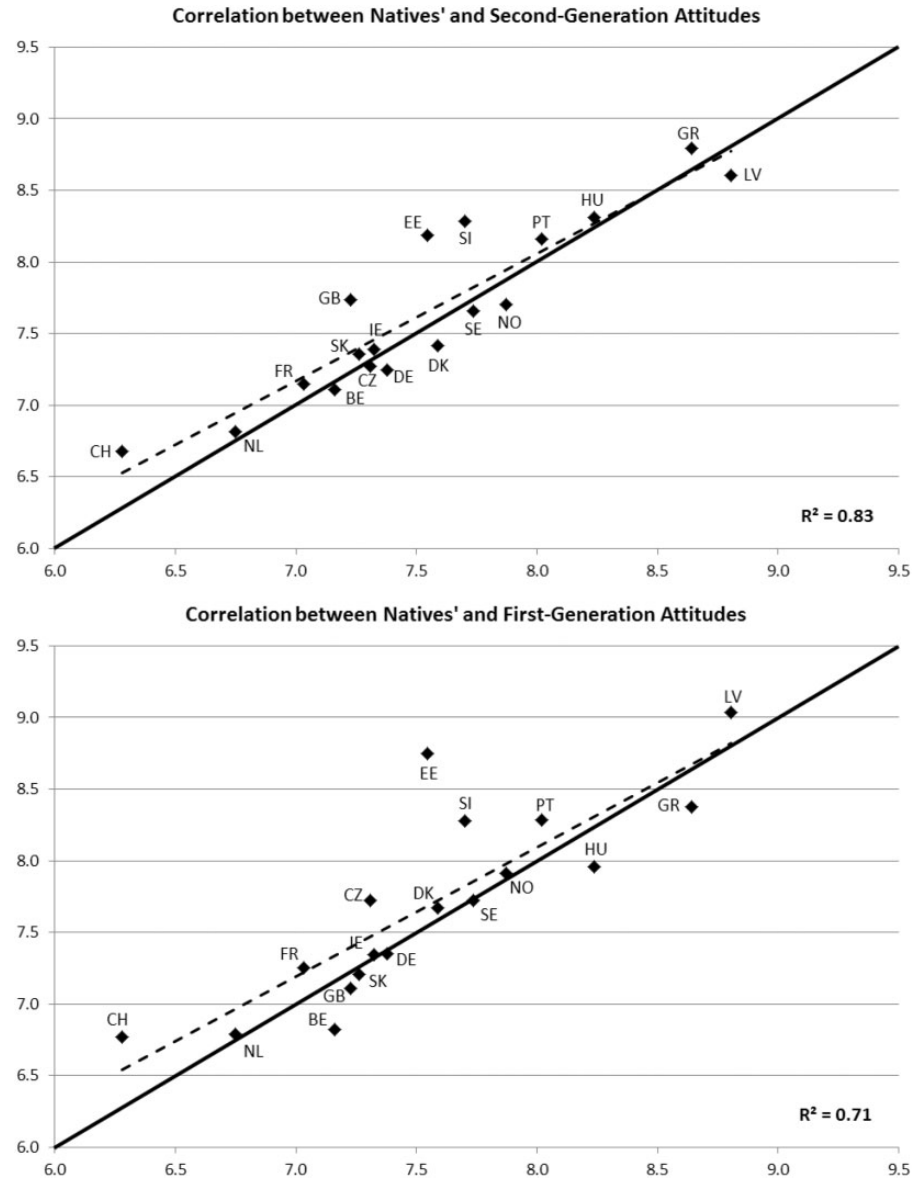


**Figure 1.** Relationship between aggregated RoG preferences among natives (X-axis) and immigrants (Y-axis).

*Note*: The solid diagonal indicates a theoretical perfect overlap between natives' and immigrants' responses to welfare redistribution. The dashed line represents the fitted line summarizing the association between natives' and immigrants' responses. Each dot represents a country in the ESS.

first-generation immigrants. Yet, if immigrant characteristics differ in how they affect welfare preferences, the direction is that the most vulnerable immigrants are slightly less in demand of interventionism than vulnerable natives. Further, citizenship—with its accompanying rights and obligations that alter stakes in welfare allocation—makes immigrants less demanding of intervention. Recently arrived immigrants are, moreover, less in support of interventionism. Not unimportantly, we found no evidence that immigrants from poorer regions are overwhelmingly more in demand of a strong RoG. These findings eventually alter the claim that newly arrived immigrants enter with strong demands from the welfare state.

We further found overwhelming evidence that immigrants' preferences for welfare state intervention

**Table 4.** Country-level effects on preferred role of government among second- and first-generation immigrants

| Fixed effects | Second generation | | First generation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Parameter | SE | Parameter | SE |
| Social expenditure per capita | −0.004 | 0.020 | −0.005 | 0.023 |
| Natives' preferred RoG | 0.643*** | 0.112 | 0.777*** | 0.144 |
| **Random effects** | **Parameter** | **SE** | **Parameter** | **SE** |
| Individual-level variance | 1.910*** | 0.071 | 1.819*** | 0.049 |
| Country-level variance | 0.036 | 0.022 | 0.094* | 0.040 |
| Individual *r*-squared | 6.601% | | 4.641% | |
| Country *r*-squared | 84.382% | | 76.869% | |
| −2loglikelihood | 5,276.832 | | 10,064.559 | |
| BIC | 5,291.413 | | 10,080.483 | |
| *N* | 1,493 | | 2,871 | |

*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$; ***$P < 0.001$. Entries represent the results of two separate multilevel regression models, controlled for the individual-level predictors of Table 3.

largely follow majority opinions. Yet, such effects are stronger for second-generation immigrants than for first-generation immigrants; also Western European immigrants follow natives' preferences easier than non-Western European immigrants do. In societies where the majority is less inclined to support government redistribution, immigrants are also less strongly in demand of interventionism. Acculturation seems to go easier for Western European than for non-Western European immigrants. This finding of the acculturation of welfare attitudes fits into related studies showing acculturation effects of majority opinion on immigrant residents (Reeskens and Wright, 2014; Dinesen and Hooghe, 2011). In any case, future detailed studies should untangle how this acculturation works in practice.

In our assessment that immigrants do not have stronger RoG preferences and that they gradually resemble natives' ideas, a few cautions are warranted. First, it needs to be kept in mind that the analysed data were not particularly collected for minority studies. Whereas related research undergirds the neat use of this ESS, we should be careful nonetheless for the fact that the ESS has surveyed only the best integrated immigrants. Although we do see in the immigrants' origin a reflection of the host countries' immigration history, we also see that average educational levels of immigrants are elevated from native respondents. Contrary, more immigrants are without a job, and have encountered unemployment experiences of at least 3 months. Studying the best integrated immigrants might reflect in smaller gaps with natives. Such gaps might thus be slightly but according to our insights not alarmingly larger if also less well-integrated respondents would be present. In any case, immigrants themselves are a very heterogeneous group in which outspoken preferences for welfare are not a given fact. This selection bias that might affect individual-level outcomes is, however, less problematic for the analysis between countries. Because every country will be equally affected by self-selection of the best immigrants (yet, some systematic differences may exist, e.g. the prevalence of undocumented immigration in certain countries), we are on firmer footing here for the results between countries than within countries.

Second, one might also claim that immigrants' attitudes towards the welfare state are not predictive for their actual behaviour within society in general, and on the labour market in particular. That is, in spite of the finding that they are not more pro-welfare compared with natives, critics might argue that this does not necessarily implicate that immigrants do not want to enjoy this safety net (cf. Koopmans, 2010). Theoretical models, such as the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), would predict that actions require an appropriate set of supporting attitudes, meaning that one might assume that immigrants who are pro-welfare will in their actions also show effort to perform well on the labour market in order to not rely on welfare provision. Nonetheless, the discrepancy between studies showing alarming unemployment levels among immigrants in more generous welfare states and our study that indicates that immigrants demand not overwhelmingly more state intervention in such countries requires more attention about the mechanisms behind such elevated unemployment levels, as it might further indicate the discriminatory barriers that prevent immigrants from full participation in the labour market and society.

## Notes

1 One liability of this study is that labour market participation in the smallest welfare states of Southern and Eastern Europe is not studied.

2 These countries are Belgium (BE), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Latvia (LV), The Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Portugal (PT), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Sweden (SE), Switzerland (CH), and the United Kingdom (GB).

3 As the descriptives in Supplementary Tables A2 and A3 show, the sampled immigrants have, on average, slightly higher educational qualifications, while

they do not earn more than natives. They further are more likely to be without a job or have been unemployed for at least 3 months.

4 Because several studies on welfare attitudes focused on the single survey question 'The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels' (Luttmer and Singhal, 2011), we also analysed this item (not discussed owing to page limitations). Results, which can be obtained from the authors, are the same as those presented throughout.

5 Although a higher share of natives is on benefits, a larger section of the native sample compared with immigrants enjoys pension benefits.

6 To correct for differences across countries, country dummies are used in the imputation model.

7 There is only a small proportion of non-citizens among the second-generation sample; potentially, this group might refrain from acquiring citizenship.

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## Supplementary Data

Supplementary data are available at *ESR* online.

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